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ABSTRACT

The attitudes toward school of retarded children in various school placements were investigated in two studies. The first study compared the attitudes of nonretarded children, and educable mentally retarded children in segregated and integrated class placements. The results indicated that the segregated group posited significantly less favorable attitudes than the other groups. Since subject selection was not random, a second study was undertaken in which retarded children were randomly assigned to integrated and segregated classes and on whom pre-integration data were collected. The results were similar to those in Study I, and were discussed in terms of the labelling process and its consequences for behavior. (For related studies, see also EC 042 062 and 042 063.) (Author)

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STUDIES IN LEARNING POTENTIAL

Attitudes Toward School by Segregated and Integrated Retarded Children: A Study and Experimental Validation

by

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ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL BY SEGREGATED AND INTEGRATED RETARDED CHILDREN: A STUDY AND EXPERIMENTAL VALIDATION[1]

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It is generally assumed that assigning a stigmatizing label to a child creates an undesirable situation. The label acts to indicate that the child is somehow different and is to be excluded from his modal group of peers. Since, as Goodenough (1956) has indicated, one basic need of children is the need to belong, to be considered as one of the group, the exclusion of a child by virtue of a particular label increases the feeling of stress beyond whatever handicapping conditions he may already possess. It has been hypothesized that individuals who are shunted into a particular group as a result of being labelled negatively, tend to engage in role behaviors that are designed to reflect the characteristics of that group and so solidify their position in the group. For example, Guskin (1963) has argued that mentally retarded children might manifest nonachievement, lack of control and helplessness behaviors because they are behaviors expected of mentally retarded individuals. Thus, the theoretical argument is advanced that the assignment of a child to a deviant group results in his behaving in conformity with his newly ascribed status.

This view of the effects of labelling indicates that three components need be considered: 1) the effects of the actual disability, 2) the accompanying stress which results from the disability, and

3) the role behaviors adopted by the child as a function of being ascribed a new status. Since it is unethical to study this problem by assigning stigmatizing labels to certain children, an alternative approach is to remove some children from a stigmatized category and examine the effects of delabelling. The present concern about desegregation of mentally retarded children is a case in point.

School children who attain low IQs and are placed in special classes tend to be rejected by other school children. They also learn less academically than children with similar IQs who remain in the regular grades. Such behaviors are expected of children who are formally labelled as mentally retarded. In the school social structure, the child is classified as mentally retarded only if he is placed in a special class. His IQ is of lesser importance in determining his subsequent behaviors. It follows, then, that such a child is no longer mentally retarded if he is removed from the special class. Consequently, it would be expected that the behaviors which characterized him as retarded should diminish and he should then become more socially acceptable both to himself and to others.

As part of a larger investigation concerned with the effects of re-integrating children into the regular grades after they had been in special classes, the present data are concerned with these children's attitudes toward school. More specifically, the present studies examined and cross-validated the attitudes toward school of mildly retarded and normal children in a variety of school placements.

STUDY I

Subjects

Thirty-five nonretarded (nonEMR) and 34 mildly retarded (EMR) Caucasian children from three elementary schools located in different suburban towns were selected as subjects. Of these subjects, 15 nonEMRs and 17 EMRs attended a nongraded elementary school which contained an experimental program for mildly retarded children. Nine of the 17 EMRs in this school were fully integrated into the mainstream academic program while the remaining eight were educated in the more conventional self-contained classroom. One month later, a partial replication was conducted in two other elementary schools which were graded and housed one special class each. Twenty non-EMRs and nine EMRs were selected from one of these schools and eight EMRs from the remaining school. All nonEMR subjects were selected randomly from all grade levels within their school. The mean IQ for the segregated retarded children was 64 while the integrated EMR children had a mean IQ of 77.

Procedures

Subjects were individually administered a 40-item School Morale Inventory which was a modification of a scale developed by Wrightsman. Every subject was required to agree or disagree that each item reflected the way he felt about his school. The experimenter read each item aloud to the subject, and in the case of retarded subjects, the items were repeated as often as was necessary.

RESULTS

A one-way analysis of variance with three groups (Normal Ss,

Integrated EMRs, Segregated EMRs) revealed significant differences among the groups in the nongraded school ($F = 9.34$, $\underline{df} = 2/29$, $p < .001$). Further analysis of this finding indicated that normal subjects and integrated EMRs exhibited significantly more positive attitudes than segregated EMRs. Since analysis of the replication data for the nonEMRs and segregated EMRs in the graded schools revealed comparable findings to those in the nongraded school, the data were collapsed across schools for additional analyses. These subsequent analyses indicated a significant Group main effect ($F = 22.00$, $\underline{df} = 2/66$, $p = <.001$). The means for the normal, integrated EMRs, and segregated EMRs were 32.60, 29.00 and 24.92 respectively, The latter mean was found to differ significantly from the former two.

STUDY II

A major limitation of the preceding findings was the subject selection bias. That is, certain retarded children were integrated only because the school administrators believed these children would be more likely to succeed than the retarded children who were retained in the segregated class placement. Since no pre-integration attitude data were available, it was not possible to ascertain whether the reported differences between the two groups existed before the integration program began. This second study compared the attitudes toward school of children who, for purposes of a large scale evaluation, were randomly assigned to an integrated or segregated setting.

Subjects

Thirty-two EMR children attending special classes in a large

Massachusetts city comprised the sample of this phase of the study. Subjects were attending schools which were scheduled to be demolished at the end of the 1970-1971 academic year. These children were to be assigned to two special classes which were being formed in a new school building which was opening in September, 1971. For purposes of this research, however, 14 subjects were randomly assigned to one self-contained classroom (control group) and the remaining 18 were integrated full-time into the general education program (experimental group). The mean IQ (standard deviation) for the experimental group was 71.47 (6.62) and for the control group it was 69.71 (8.96). The former group's mean CA of 138.63 (15.97) months was similar to the controls 139.64 (18.27).

Procedures

As before, the items were read aloud to each subject. This time, however, the School Morale Inventory consisted of 24 items which were selected from item analyses of the 40 item scale on an EMR and marginal achieving sample of 120. The resulting internal reliability of the 24 item School Morale Inventory is .71.

The 32 subjects were administered the School Morale Inventory twice; once while they were attending the special class in their old school building, and the second time after they had spent two months in their new school.

RESULTS

The data for the experimental and control groups were analyzed in a one-way analysis of covariance design with the pretest attitude score serving as the covariate and the posttest score as the dependent measure. The results indicated a significant treatment

main effect (F = 5.75, df = 1/2-, p = .023) indicating that the integrated retarded children reported more favorable school attitudes than the segregated ones. The pre- and posttest means (standard deviations) for the experimental group were 11.78 (4.98) and 14.89 (4.48) respectively, while the pre- and posttest means (standard deviations) for the control group were 11.29 (5.09) and 11.86 (1.46) respectively.

DISCUSSION

The results of these investigations indicate that removing a stigmatizing label from school children results in their perceiving school in more favorable terms. These results are somewhat consistent with those reported by Rubin, et. a. (1968) who found that mothers of emotionally disturbed children ascribed more favorable school attitudes to their children when the latter were assigned to regular classes rather than to classes for the emotionally disturbed.

Of major concern, however, are the behavioral consequences of improved school morale. If retarded children who were removed from the special class perceive school more favorably now that they are in the regular grades, how does this affect their behavior in school? Based upon Edgerton's 1967 findings on adult retardates who were released from institutions, it would be expected that re-integrated children who are now in a new school building would strive to conceal their previous history of special class placement. One result would be that these children would manifest fewer behavior problems than children who remain in the segregated classes. Preliminary findings using a teacher behavior rating scale with these subjects

indicate that in fact, this is not the case. A second possible consequence of re-integration might be that the children would tend to avoid association both with special class children and with individuals (teachers, researchers, etc.) associated with the special class. Evidence for this is provided by Gampel and Lerner, who found that integrated retarded children (described in Study I) performed less well than segregated EMRs on a paired associate learning task even though their mean IQ was 13 points higher. These authors reported that the distinguishing characteristic of the integrated group was their extreme reluctance to participate in the experiment. Observation of their performance in their classroom indicated they tended to be overly restricted in their behavior, tending toward minimal spontaneous interaction with peers or teachers (Gampel, Harrison and Budoff, 1972).

A very preliminary finding with the second sample suggests that a key area in which re-integration affects the child and which may be a correlate of school related attitudes is in his perception of others' view of himself. The integrated children in the second study indicated no differences in their self-perceptions on a self-concept instrument but more favorable perceptions of themselves by others following integration. The children who remained in the self-contained classes showed no changes in self-perception in the new school building but continued to feel that others viewed them as deviants.

While the authors support the present trend toward re-integration of mildly handicapped students in the regular grades, there have been few investigations of the socio-psychological implications of the effects of returning segregated children from their stigmatized

environment to the regular grades. We must become cognizant of the very complex events which occur in the children. For example, we must learn how to engender support for desirable achievement and social outcomes. Otherwise, unduly high or low expectancies of the teachers and children will result in a sense of futility and discouragement and possibly, a return to the segregation option. The present bandwagon swing toward integration programs must be accompanied by intensive study of the short and long term effects on the partners to the transaction, the child and the teacher.

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Footnote

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